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Regina Bechtle S.C.

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The 1846 Separation of the New York Sisters: Conflict Over Mission or Clash of Wills?

BY

REGINA BECHTLE, S.C.

The novelist Peter Quinn delivers an insight into the New York City of the mid-nineteenth century (and of today) when he writes: "New York is about argument, ambiguity and attitude Every fact, event and opinion offer[s] the odds-on possibility of an altercation" New Yorkers, he says, love to squabble. Twas ever thus, from the days of the Dutch and the English, then the Patriots and the Tories, down through the seemingly unending ethnic, political and class tensions. "When push comes to shove—and this is the town where it usually does," a penchant for disagreement is the city's "existential cement."¹

I believe it is fair to say that "argument, ambiguity and attitude" characterized some of the protagonists in the events leading to the separation of about thirty Sisters of Charity serving in New York from their Emmitsburg motherhouse on 8 December 1846, and their formation of a new diocesan community under the authority of Bishop John Hughes. Most historians have painted the separation as the result of a conflict of wills, a battle between New York's Archbishop Hughes and the Sulpician Louis Regis Deluol, the ecclesiastical superior of the Emmitsburg community. And that is understandable, since the primary voices to which historians have listened are Hughes' and Deluol's. The two men, along with Mother Etienne Hall, clashed over two major issues: "the primary authority over the Sisters assigned to institutions in the New York diocese and the direct care of boys over three years of age."² In this view, the sisters seem to be mere pawns, manipulated either by the imperious, irascible bishop to achieve his long-desired goal of a diocesan congregation, or manipulated by loyalty to superiors to whom they owed religious obedience. Depending on one's sympathies, one can applaud either Deluol for his determination to preserve the autonomy of the sisterhood from the encroachments of

¹ "Dear, Disagreeable New York," *America*, vol 178, no. 3 (Jan. 31, 1998): 6-7.

² Ellin M. Kelly (ed.), *Numerous Choirs: A Chronicle of Elizabeth Bayley Seton and Her Spiritual Daughters*, 2 vols. (Evansville, IN: Mater Dei Provincialate, 1996), 2:137. Hughes had raised the first issue with Archbishop Eccleston of Baltimore in 1842 and again in 1845, as potential agenda items for the Fifth and Sixth Provincial Councils. See Kelly, 2:113, 132.

control-hungry bishops, or Hughes for his equally stubborn determination to guard his episcopal authority.

But this interpretation — that of a power struggle between two strong-willed men — is only part of the story. The issues were much more complex, and the consequences far-reaching. The Sisters of Charity were the largest religious community of women in the U.S. in the first half of the nineteenth century, and the most widespread. By the mid-1840's they were serving in 11 of the 22 U.S. dioceses, in over 20 different cities,³ laying the foundations of the church's vast infrastructure of charity, caring for orphans, the sick, the insane, the elderly, teaching immigrant children. The Sisters of Charity had been on the New York scene since 1817. They were not naive, either about the needs of the poor or the realities of Church politics. Many of them were seasoned missionaries who were used to dealing with the often conflicting demands of lay trustees and managers, bishops and pastors, superiors near and far.

What is missing from the standard interpretations of the New York separation is the lens of *mission* — the mission of the church, incarnated in concrete responses to local needs, and the mission of the religious congregation, its specific way of following Christ and his Gospel, its way of serving the church and the world, expressed in particular ministries. The premise of this *panel* is that mission was and remained key to the identity of apostolic congregations of women like the Sisters of Charity, and also that differences of context — of place, gender and ecclesiastical position — necessarily shaped varying theologies of mission and practices of ministry.

The premise of this *paper* is that the New York separation was as much a result of differing interpretations of mission as it was a clash of wills. On the one hand, there was the sense of mission flowing from the pastoral dilemma of the Sisters who were immediately faced with the overwhelming needs of immigrants flocking to New York. On the other, there was the interpretation of mission flowing from the institutional dilemma of the superiors who sought to ensure the community's freedom to interpret and continue its mission as it determined best.

That story of mission can best be told by those who were on its front lines, closest to the day-by-day experience of living it, namely the Sisters themselves. They certainly have the most to say about the

³ Ibid, 2:263.

human cost of the decision; they had to bear the major brunt of its consequences. I hope to let the voices of some of these women speak, as they emerge from the testimonies of letters written to or by or about them. The New York Sisters' separation involves many more issues than can be explored in this presentation, which merely marks the beginning of substantial work in progress.

The New York experience

The Sisters of Charity had served in New York since 1817 when Mother Elizabeth Seton sent three Sisters from Emmitsburg (Sisters Rose White, Cecilia O'Conway and Felicité Brady) to the Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum on Manhattan's Prince Street near Saint Patrick's Cathedral, then close to the city's northernmost boundary.⁴ At that time, there were about 15,000 Catholics in the city.⁵ By 1826, less than ten years later, the Catholic population had more than doubled. At that time John Dubois was Bishop of New York; his report to Rome of 1829-30 noted that there were 35,000 Catholics in the city.⁶ By 1834, the three original Sisters had become 34, serving in five asylums and schools in New York City (more than in any other city where the community had missions), Brooklyn, and Albany. By the crucial year of 1846 in the diocese now led by Bishop John Hughes, the number of Sisters had almost doubled, to 61 — about one-fifth of the total community — in nine missions in New York City, Brooklyn, Utica and Rochester.⁷

Why were so many Sisters on mission in New York? Immigration, of course. By mid-century, waves of immigrants had swelled the number of Catholics in New York City to 200,000 — one-third of the city's total population. New York was known as the largest Irish city in the world — and the third largest German city.⁸ New Yorkers, native and transplanted, have always thought of their city as unique, having the best of the best and the worst of the worst. Bishop Hughes, with a certain perverse pride, would ask for prayers for "the Church

⁴ Marie De Lourdes Walsh, S.C., *The Sisters of Charity of New York, 1809-1859*, 2 vols. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1960), 1:42-48.

⁵ Jay Dolan, *The Immigrant Church: New York's Irish and German Catholics* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 11. Before becoming Bishop of New York in 1826, Dubois, a Sulpician, had been the superior of the Sisters of Charity (1811-1826).

⁶ Kelly, *Numerous Choirs*, 2:41. There were about 150,000 Catholics in the whole diocese.

⁷ By this time, 37 years after the community's foundation, the Sisters of Charity numbered approximately 300 on 37 missions.

⁸ Walsh, 1:150.

of this Babylon the great."⁹ Sisters writing home to the motherhouse would speak of themselves as exiles far away from the Promised Land. New York was a city of contrasts, and the plight of the poor confronted the Sisters each day on an overwhelming scale. In 1837, one Sister wrote: "It would make your heart sorrowful to see the number of poor that have filled our streets during this year looking for employment, starving to death almost."¹⁰

The Story Unfolds

In the fall of 1845 Mother Etienne Hall (who had been elected to lead the Sisters of Charity only three months before), and the Council in Emmitsburg, issued a mandate that the Sisters were to be withdrawn from the care of boys in asylums and schools.¹¹ They thus decided to enforce the statement in the community's rules, "A secondary but not less important [end] is to honor the Sacred Infancy of Jesus in the young persons of their sex"¹² An entire article could be devoted to this decision about the care of boys and the factors which contributed to it. Several dioceses were affected, including Baltimore, Saint Louis, Cincinnati, Mobile and New York.¹³ The issue was a matter of longstanding controversy, as Sister Betty Ann McNeil's paper has documented.¹⁴ New York in particular was a thorn in Emmitsburg's side, because of overcrowded conditions which put a heavy burden on the Sisters in Saint Patrick's Asylum (where Sister Elizabeth Boyle with 16 Sisters cared for several hundred boys and girls) and Saint Joseph's Half-Orphan Asylum (where Sister Lucy Ignatius Gwynn with eight Sisters cared for over 100 children).¹⁵

In June, 1846, in response to the community's directive, Bishop Hughes instead proposed what had long been on his mind: to allow the Sisters to choose either to return to Emmitsburg or to stay in New York and form a new community under his jurisdiction. He wrote to

⁹ Hughes to Mother Rose White, 28 March 1838, Archives of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, Mount Saint Vincent, Riverdale, NY. (Hereafter AMSV) 400: 2, 5.

¹⁰ Sister Mary Jerome Ely to Sister Benedicta [Parsons], Saint Joseph's (AMSV, notes by Mother Mary Fuller, p 23, 400: 2, 1).

¹¹ Kelly, *Numerous Choirs*, 2:130-131.

¹² "Regulations for the Society of Sisters of Charity In the United States of America," Archives of Saint Joseph Provincial House (ASJPH) 3-2-13.

¹³ Kelly, *Numerous Choirs*, 2:131.

¹⁴ Betty Ann McNeil, D.C., "The Sulpicians and the Sisters of Charity: Concentric Circles of Mission," paper delivered at the Conference on the History of Women Religious, Loyola University, Chicago, 22 June 1998, 23, 25-26, 48-49 (nn. 92, 93).

¹⁵ Walsh, 1:88.



Mother Mary Etienne Hall. Served as superior in Emmitsburg from 1845 to 1855, presiding during the tumultuous separation in 1846 of some thirty Sisters of Charity who joined with Bishop John Hughes to form their own community in New York.

Courtesy, Archives of the Daughters of Charity, Emmitsburg, MD

Father Deluol about his plan of “retaining the Sisters, now in this diocese (who choose to remain) with the consent of their Superiors to be transferred of their obedience to the ordinary”¹⁶ The situation

¹⁶ Hughes to Louis Regis Deluol, 7 June 1846, typescript copy in AMSV 400/402, 9. As an item for the Fifth Provincial Council in 1843, Hughes had suggested that, because so many Sisters of Charity were at a distance from the Motherhouse, some “modification of their system” be discussed. (Hughes to Archbishop Eccleston, Baltimore, 5 December 1842, Archives of the Archdiocese of Baltimore (AAB) quoted in Kelly, *Numerous Choirs*, 2:113.) In fact, Bishop Dubois had made a similar suggestion much earlier, soon after he was named to the see of New York. Sister Elizabeth Boyle recorded that Dubois had broached the subject with her after his return from Europe (around 1831). He had asked her “to leave the community” because in his opinion it was losing its original spirit. One of his main objections, which he voiced several times to Mother Rose White, was Sisters being sent to missions far from the Motherhouse. See ASJPH 1-3-3-5:60 (Dubois to Mother Rose White, 9 December 1831) and 1-3-3:69 (5 January 1838); Archives of the Ursulines of Quebec (AUQ), Boyle to Mother Marie of the Incarnation [Cecilia O’Conway], 11 May 1851; Sister Marie de Lourdes Walsh, S.C., *Mother Elizabeth Boyle: Mother of Charity* (New York: Paulist, 1955), 76-77.

escalated rapidly, generating more heat than light. The barrage of correspondence between community superiors and Hughes reveals much misunderstanding on both sides, taking of offense, wounded pride, perceived threats to each one's authority by the other, confusing and even contradictory statements, little attempt to understand the opposing position and little desire to seek a compromise. Correspondence of the Sisters, on the other hand, reveals the pain of the impossible situation into which they were forced, and the overriding awareness that, no matter what the choice, the mission would be affected. It is time to listen to the voices of four of the Sisters involved, two of whom would eventually choose to return to Emmitsburg, and two of whom would choose to stay in New York.

Let the Women Speak

Listen first to **Sr. Williamanna Hickey**, Superior of Saint Joseph's School, N.Y., since it began in 1833, and sister of Reverend John Hickey who had been Sulpician superior of the Sisters of Charity, (1829-1841). On 19 June 1846 she represented to Mother Etienne Hall some aspects of the New York situation of which her superior in Emmitsburg might not have been aware. She says of Bishop Hughes, "It is the difficulty of providing for the Boys at this moment that has caused him to act as he has."

She paints a convincing picture. She describes how approximately 140 boys lived in one of the overcrowded asylums. (In other cities where the sisters served, the number of boys was small by comparison.) Hughes had returned in April from a trip to Europe with the promise of Brothers, who were expected by October to take over the care of boys. In addition, a grant of land from the City Council on which Hughes planned to build an orphanage for boys was pending, and he was soliciting funds. Removing the Sisters at this delicate juncture would sabotage both the Bishop's plans to provide suitable (and separate) homes for male and female orphans, and his credibility with the public authorities, ever tenuous in the anti-Catholic, antebellum climate of church-state relations.

Williamanna appeals to Mother Etienne's compassion for the orphans, who will have to be sent to "the protestant asylum" — "My dear Mother your heart would break to see the present institutions under the care of the Sisters broken up — . . . all this good set aside — and then the state of our community after such a scene — all the blame thrown on the Superiors" She pleads with her superior to

"overcome the Bishop by a magnanimous act of generosity" and "let the Boys remain until the Brothers come."¹⁷

Next, listen to **Sr. Rosalia Green**, the Visitatrix¹⁸ appointed by Emmitsburg for the New York missions. After spending three weeks in New York in June to see if matters could be resolved, she reported to Mother Etienne on 23 June 1846 about the rapidly escalating situation. She had spoken with Hughes, who felt misunderstood by Deluol, and said he had "no wish to have the Sisters removed," and only wished the separation if all agreed to it.¹⁹

Rosalia then had gathered all the sisters, explained the Bishop's proposal and the community's refusal, and read the circular and the Superior's letters.²⁰ Some were already aware of the situation; most felt it deeply. She gives a quick rundown of each local superior's reaction and probable response to Mother Etienne, if a decision has to be made between coming home and staying. Underneath her words we can sense the pull of competing loyalties:

Sister Elizabeth . . . has his [Hughes'] entire confidence, but I believe all [at Saint Patrick's] will come home, many most willing. Sister Jerome's Sisters [at Saint Peter's School] all seemed to feel it, but all are ready to go home. Sister Wm. Anna's also [at Saint Joseph's Select School], but all ready to come, many are glad of the opportunity Sister Beatrice [at Sister Mary's School] feels very much leaving

¹⁷ Sister Williamanna Hickey to Mother Etienne Hall, 19 June 1846 [original in ASJPH 7-4-1, 5, typescript in AMSV, Letter Book V, no 55, 400/403, 11]. It is notable that Williamanna expresses the opinion that, if matters came to a head, none of the 60 sisters would remain in New York.

¹⁸ The Visitatrix was a Sister appointed to oversee a number of mission houses at a distance from the Motherhouse. The role was introduced in 1844, after the model used by the French Daughters of Charity.

¹⁹ One wonders if the bishop was being naive or political in expecting that the community would happily release 60 Sisters, about one-fifth of their total membership, to his jurisdiction.

²⁰ On 18 June 1846, after receiving Hughes' letter, Deluol wrote to the Sisters in New York and clearly laid out the conflicting positions. The Bishop, "for the greater good of his Diocese," wished to have "sole and exclusive control" of the Sisters; the community's superiors believed it was their "sacred duty" to recall all the New York Sisters and to prevent this attempt to break up the community. The Sisters were left free either to "obey our call" or to "form a new society." The letter leaves no doubt that those who chose the latter would henceforth be regarded as "cut off from the Community as perfect strangers to us . . . We will only be united in the common communion of Saints, as we are with the Christians who live in China." In closing, Deluol assured a warm reception for those who chose to return home, and offered an underlined "God bless you" for those who did not. (Original in ASJPH 7-8-3, 58.)

her children, but I think it will soon pass Sister Lucy's Sisters [at Saint Joseph's Half-Orphan Asylum] feel very much leaving the orphans, herself particularly yet she showed a determination from the first to come.

Rosalia spells out the cost of removing the sisters: "The prospect of leaving the orphans alone is truly heart-rending"; she doubts that anyone will be found to take over their care. In the mind of many, including the Bishop, losing the sisters would be "the ruin of religion in New York The greatest calamity that ever fell on . . . this diocese" — and superiors in Emmitsburg would bear the brunt of the blame. Rosalia urges Etienne to try to work out some arrangement to avoid this.²¹

But no compromise was achieved, nor did the hoped-for Brothers arrive from Europe. The impasse grew more and more serious. On 6 December 1846 Deluol sent the community's decision to Hughes: those Sisters who wished to remain with the Motherhouse were to return almost immediately; those who wished to stay in New York were to request a dispensation from vows. Two days later, on 8 December, Hughes conveyed this news to each Superior, and added that any Sister who wished to join the new community he was forming should let him know as soon as possible.

The Sisters were told that they had a choice, and they were to decide individually. For women schooled in the vow and virtue of obedience, such a choice must have been excruciating, as is evident from the community record which reports that on only one mission out of nine did all the Sisters come to the same decision.

Sister Elizabeth Boyle, the most experienced Sister on the New York missions at the time of the separation, had been Superior of Saint Patrick's Asylum for nearly 25 years. She was well known in the community, serving as an assistant to Mother Seton (1814-1820) and mistress of novices (1815-1820). Elizabeth Seton considered her a friend and confidante, referring to her as "dearest old partner of my cares

²¹ Sister Rosalia Green to Mother Etienne Hall, 23 June 1846 (ASJPH 7-8-3, 33). Like Sister Williamanna Hickey, Rosalia also believed that all the New York sisters would return to their Motherhouse.

and bearer of my burdens."²² Since she was a woman who kept her own counsel, we would have virtually no record of her feelings about the separation were it not for the discovery of a set of her letters to Mother Marie of the Incarnation (the former Sister of Charity Cecilia O'Conway) in the Ursuline Convent of Quebec.²³

In June, 1845, Elizabeth writes happily to Cecilia about "our much loved Valley old friends," and about the flourishing works in New York. There is no hint of the impending crisis which would erupt in October with the directive removing Sisters from the care of boys.²⁴ In August, 1846, Cecilia responds to another letter from Elizabeth.²⁵ Cecilia is distressed to learn that the Council in Emmitsburg is contemplating doing away with the boys' asylums. "What a shock such a step will make over the U.S. . . . What new Spirit has risen in our days? Surely not Father Dubois, nor the tenderhearted Mother Seton's. Alas! what a world of changes!"²⁶

In four letters written between 1851 and 1859, Elizabeth Boyle paints a revealing picture of the months leading to the 1846 separation, "*memorable days of trouble and anxiety*," unforgettably stamped on her memory. As she tells the story in a letter of May, 1851, after the 1845 directive which prohibited caring for boys, Bishop Hughes protested to Mother Etienne that "if they [superiors in Emmitsburg] would take upon themselves to turn the children in the street they might do it but he would not," since he had no place for them to go. Deluol's letter followed: if the boys were not gone by a specified time, the community would remove the Sisters; any who wished to stay would be given a dispensation from vows, but this would "*cut them off forever from Saint Joseph's*," that "*much loved and still dear venerated spot*." Elizabeth comments about this "terrible time" of "severe trial": "What

²² AMSV 110:10, 26, Seton to Sister Elizabeth Boyle, Philadelphia, 25 October, 1820. Boyle was among those who chose to stay in New York in 1846. In witness to the reverence in which she was held, she was elected Mother of the new diocesan community at its first election on 31 December 1846.

²³ I am indebted to Sister Elaine Wheeler, archivist of the Northeast Province of the Daughters of Charity, for calling my attention to these letters. Sister Cecilia O'Conway had been the first woman to join Mother Seton's community, and one of the first three Sisters sent by her to New York in 1817. As members of the first vow group in 1813, she and Elizabeth Boyle shared the joys and sorrows of the early days in Emmitsburg. In 1822, after Mother Seton had died, Cecilia left to join the Ursuline convent in Quebec and was known there as Mother Marie of the Incarnation.

²⁴ This and subsequent references are from my transcriptions of copies of the manuscript letters. The originals are in the Archives of the Ursulines of Quebec (AUQ).

²⁵ Sister Elizabeth Boyle's letter was not available at the time this paper was written.

²⁶ AUQ, Mother Marie of the Incarnation to Sister Elizabeth Boyle, 11 August 1846.

a heart rending situation our poor Sisters were placed in to desert hundreds of poor orphans for whom they had been labouring so many years" ²⁷

Sister Aloysia Lilly, who in August, 1846, replaced Elizabeth Boyle as head of Saint Patrick's Asylum, ²⁸ practically echoes her words. On 8 December, the day of decision, she wrote to Deluol: ". . . [I]s not this heartbreaking. I know your dear heart will feel the pang." Included are requests for dispensations. She feels more will be sent; "it seems their minds are not made up entirely." ²⁹ On the same day Aloysia wrote to a Sister in Philadelphia: ". . . What do you think my feelings must be this day to see the dear souls separating from us." She has just written seven petitions for dispensation; "These seven are my Sisters . . . Oh! this scene of affliction will remain in my sad heart . . ." ³⁰

And on 12 December, when those who chose to return left for Emmitsburg, Aloysia (who would herself go the next day) spoke of those remaining: "Poor things, their bitter tears, pale faces, and sleepless nights show the grief of their hearts . . . And the work is all their own I suppose only, for I do not know, the schools are all to be continued." She feels sad to be separated from "so many dear old Sisters whom I shall see no more," even some companions of Mother Seton. ³¹

Of these speakers, the first and third (Williamanna Hickey and Elizabeth Boyle) remained in New York. The second and fourth (Rosalia Green and Aloysia Lilly) returned to Emmitsburg.

²⁷ AUQ, Sister Elizabeth Boyle to Mother Marie of the Incarnation [Cecilia O'Conway], 11 May [18]51.

²⁸ Hughes wrote to Mother Etienne on 1 August 1846, asking for assurances that Sisters would not be removed without consultation. He likens the current arrangement to "a spring, which is to be moved by persons at a distance, who know nothing of the circumstances and consequences of their action." He concludes by respectfully but firmly insisting that Superiors make no change, "especially of Sister Servants [Superiors]," without informing him and taking his views into consideration. (ASJPH 7-4-1, 61). However, the Council had already decided (at its meeting of July 29) to transfer Elizabeth Boyle to Rochester, Williamanna Hickey to Utica, and Lucy Ignatius Gwynn to Albany. This action can be variously interpreted as an accident of poor timing, an intentional slap in the Bishop's face, or an attempt to defuse the situation by removing some key sisters from the New York maelstrom and bringing in other, presumably more dispassionate, veterans (including the Bishop's own sister, Sister Mary Angela Hughes).

²⁹ Lilly to Deluol, 8 December 1846 (original in ASJPH 7-4-1, 70).

³⁰ Lilly to Sister Anna Maria, 8 December 1846 (original in ASJPH 7-4-1, 69).

³¹ Lilly to Deluol, 12 December 1846 (original in ASJPH 7-4-1, 75).

Conclusion

It could be argued that the Church in the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century was coming to a sense of its self-identity as a national and local church. The bishops of the larger dioceses played a major role in this process, and so the New York separation was perhaps inevitable. (One might even say that Hughes' operational belief "that those who owe obedience shall be more immediately under the Supervision of those to whom it is due"³² was a nineteenth century version of the principle of subsidiarity.)

But the same movement toward self-identity was also taking place in the Sisters of Charity, as it came to awareness of itself as an organizational and spiritual entity in its own right. Though unmistakably embedded in the church of the United States, it was also an apostolic community of religious women dedicated to a way of life in pursuit of holiness and with its own mission to serve Jesus Christ in the poor. And when its legitimate interests were threatened, superiors had every right to act to preserve it. (Imagine the uproar if a bishop today were to interfere in a community's policies, governance, and internal affairs as did Hughes.) So Church and community, two types of institutions, were coming to different self-understandings.

Besides, different understandings of mission were operative, depending on one's location. New Yorkers saw, up close and personal, the needs of the immigrants who poured from the docks of their port city into the New World. Superiors in Emmitsburg were removed from the urgency of the situation, and had to divide their attention and resources among all of the community's far-flung missions, not just New York.

The New York community has always told the story of its beginnings, and the women who decided to stay in New York, as a story of a painful choice made "for the sake of the mission." With the luxury of historical hindsight, the story becomes infinitely more complex. And yet, as I have tried to show through the voices of the Sisters, a core of truth remains: mission was the crux of it all. The sisters were given a 'Sophie's Choice'; choose which of your children, which of your loves, you will leave behind. Much more than rancor or division, their letters bear witness to the heartbreak of this choice, and the power of their passion for the mission. Those who returned to Emmitsburg upheld the right of community superiors to define the

³² Hughes to Deluol, 7 June 1846 (ASJPH 7-4-1, 53).

terms of mission; those who stayed in New York chose to question the wisdom of the superiors' decision in light of the needs of mission before their eyes. Down to our own day, and probably well into the future, these questions remain relevant: Who participates in pastoral planning? Who in the church ultimately decides what needs are to be addressed, and how, and by whom? What are the mutual rights and responsibilities of bishops and religious communities with regard to mission?

Limits of time prevent a fuller exploration of questions such as the following:

1. What spirituality of authority and obedience was operative in the community? How did it influence decisions and behaviors, especially of those in leadership? What influence did the New York and Cincinnati separations from Emmitsburg, and Emmitsburg's affiliation with France, have on the sisters' spirituality and practice of obedience?

2. What did the sisters make of the larger conflicts between clerical superiors of communities and bishops in whose dioceses they served? How did they see their own role, as women and as religious? Around what other issues did tensions arise between the sisters' first-hand experience of a local situation and the different perspective which the Motherhouse usually held?

3. As the community expanded and missions became more far-flung, how did sisters maintain a sense of connection with each other? What means of communication — and control — did superiors put in place? How and where did both draw the line between adaptation to local needs and interference with the community's core identity?

4. In other cities the Sisters cared for orphan boys. How did these missions deal with the Emmitsburg mandate that precipitated the crisis? Did these Sisters ever tell their friends in New York about their way of accommodating to the mandate?

5. How much did the New York Sisters know about the unfolding drama? Did they ever talk about it around the community room table? Is there any indication that the New York Superiors ever discussed it together?

6. Did anyone in Emmitsburg or New York, besides Elizabeth Boyle, remember the proposal of Bishop Dubois, who was highly respected by the Sisters, to open a New York motherhouse in the 1830's? And why in 1846 did Elizabeth Boyle agree to Hughes' plan for an independent community when she had rejected Dubois ear-

lier?³³ Was it because of Hughes' greater persuasiveness, or was it perhaps the wisdom of Boyle's experience of fifteen more years of the grinding poverty and overwhelming needs of New York's immigrant church?

7. How much did Deluol's awareness of the governmental model of the French Daughters of Charity color his insistence on a strong central government, independent of episcopal control, for the community in the United States?

8. In his belief (stated in his pivotal letter to Deluol of 7 June 1846) that "those who owe obedience shall be more immediately under the Supervision of those to whom it is due," was Hughes aware of a similar position held by Bishop John England of Charleston, South Carolina, in 1829? England did not seek Roman approval of his rule for the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy in his diocese because, as he said, "I do not wish to make my institutions dependent upon superiors over whom I have neither control or influence."³⁴ How much was Hughes influenced by England in this regard?

9. In a letter to Bishop Anthony Blanc of New Orleans, Deluol made the tantalizing remark that there were about 20 dissatisfied Sisters in New York of whom he wanted to be relieved.³⁵ Who were they and what had they done to so antagonize Deluol?

And the lesson for us today? When one remembers that "no two people are capable of seeing the world exactly the same," says organizational consultant Margaret Wheatley, one becomes curious about others' viewpoints and less defensive about one's own. And groups that are curious and open to the various perspectives within their members, she finds, are more able to come together in united action. "Over and over I witnessed people able to agree on a common future because they had listened to very different perceptions of their past.

³³ In a letter to Mother Marie of the Incarnation in which Elizabeth Boyle reflects on her choice to break with the Emmitsburg community, she states that she would have been less willing to make such an irrevocable decision, had not Bishop Dubois made the very same suggestion (that she leave the community) on his return from a trip to Europe (Dubois had missed the First Provincial Council held in Baltimore in October, 1829, because he had left for Europe to seek priests and funds; see Kelly, 2:36.) She recalls that Dubois felt that the community was losing its original spirit. At the time, she says, the idea of cutting herself off from Saint Joseph's, "that much loved and still dear venerated spot," was most distasteful to her. Concluding this memoir with a rare glimpse into her inner life, she confides, "[W]ords can never tell what the sufferings of my mind have been on this subject." (Boyle to Mother Marie of the Incarnation, 11 May 1851, AUQ; AMSV typescript.)

³⁴ JoAnn Kay McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1996), 607; citing Mary Ewens, "The Leadership of Nuns in Immigrant Catholicism," in Rosemary Ruether and Rosemary S Keller, eds., *Women and Religion in America*, vol. 1 (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 114.

³⁵ Deluol to Blanc, 6 January 1847 (Archives of the University of Notre Dame, V-5-g).

In honoring these unique perceptions, they were developing a richer picture of who they were. Simultaneously, they were creating a strong sense of unity for moving towards who they wanted to be.”³⁶

I trust that we who represent different branches from the common root of Charity can say “Amen” to that.

SIGNIFICANT DATES RELATED TO THE NEW YORK SEPARATION

- Aug. 1817: As the community’s second mission, Mother Seton sends three Sisters to take over an orphan asylum in New York, already the city with the largest population in the U.S. Only two parishes serve the city’s 15,000 mostly Irish and German Catholics.
- Dec. 1822: Sister Elizabeth Boyle, 12 years in community and 34 years old, is missioned to New York as Sister Servant of Saint Patrick’s Asylum; she serves for almost 24 years in this role.
- Jan. 1838: John Hughes is consecrated bishop, coadjutor to John Dubois in the diocese of New York, which spans all of New York State and eastern New Jersey. By this time, Sisters of Charity are serving on 11 missions in New York City, Brooklyn, Albany and Utica.
- Dec. 1842: Hughes submits, as an agenda item for the Fifth Provincial Council, that the fact of so many Sisters of Charity at a distance from their Motherhouse seems “to call for a modification of their system.”
- July, 1844: Emmitsburg Council appoints Sister Rosalia Green as Visitatrix to keep in closer touch with Sisters in New York, Brooklyn, Albany, Utica and Boston.
- Oct. 1845: Emmitsburg superiors (Father Deluol, Mother Etienne and Council) notify bishops that Sisters are to be withdrawn from care of boys.

³⁶ Margaret Wheatley, “Love and Fear in Organizations,” unpublished address to Global Education Associates conference, April 1998, N.Y.

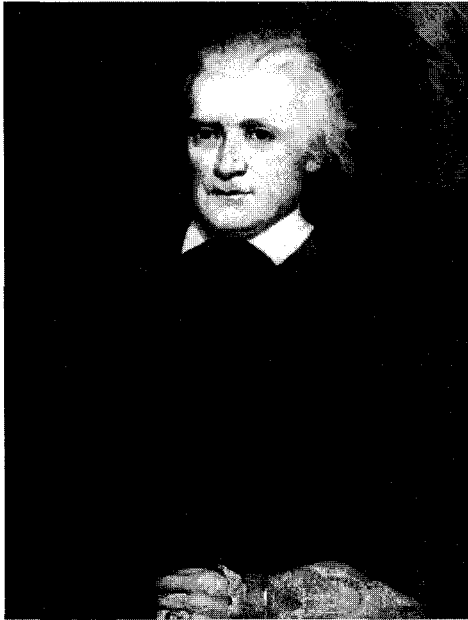
- Nov. 1845: As agenda for the Sixth Provincial Council, Hughes again brings up "the condition of the Sisters of Charity," mentioning their concern that the current spirit and practices of government seem to be changing the community's primitive spirit.
- May, 1846: Deluol prepares a statement for the Sixth Provincial Council which reaffirms the community's autonomy and right to change sisters, appoint superiors, etc. Any bishop who wishes to have Sisters of Charity must agree to these conditions.
- June, 1846: Hughes writes to Deluol that he cannot abandon 130-140 orphan boys; proposes that superiors allow those Sisters who wish to remain in New York and transfer obedience to him to do so; suggests 19 March 1847 as the date. Hughes is in negotiations with the city for land on which to build several new charitable institutions, including a boys' asylum.
- June-Aug.
1846: Exchange of letters between and among Deluol and Hughes, Mother Etienne and the Sisters in New York; the situation escalates, despite efforts of individuals to mediate and offer compromises.
- Aug. 1846: Common Council of New York leases land on Fifth Avenue between 51st and 52nd Streets to the diocese for \$1 a year, with the condition that the proposed boys' asylum be built there within three years.
- Aug. 1846: Superiors of three largest New York missions are transferred: Sister Elizabeth Boyle, from Saint Patrick's Asylum to Rochester; Sister Williamanna Hickey, from Saint Peter's School to Utica; Sister Lucy Ignatia Gwynn, from Saint Joseph's Half-Orphan Asylum to Albany. Sister Angela Hughes, the bishop's sister, is moved from Utica to New York City.
- Dec. 1846: (12/4): Deluol communicates the decision to Hughes and to Sister Servants in New York: those who wish to remain with the Emmitsburg motherhouse should return; those who wish to remain in New York are offered a dispensation from their vows of obedience.
- (12/8): Hughes asks the Sisters in New York to inform him as soon as possible if any wish to join the community he is forming for the needs of the diocese.

- (12/12): Departure of the Sisters who choose to return to Emmitsburg (approximately half of the 62 Sisters in New York returned, and approximately half remained).
- (12/31): First election of superiors of the Sisters of Charity of New York; Sister Elizabeth Boyle is chosen as Mother, with Councillors: Sisters Angela Hughes, Williamanna Hickey, and M. Jerome Ely.

KEY FIGURES

In Emmitsburg:

Reverend Louis Regis Deluol, S.S. — b. 1787, France; d. 1858 — Sulpician superior in the U.S., 1829-1841; superior general of the Sisters of Charity, 1826-1830; 1841-1849, during the New York separation.



Louis Regis Deluol. A Sulpician, Deluol served as ecclesiastical superior of Emmitsburg community, battling wills with Bishop John Hughes over the mission of the Sisters and, eventually, their ultimate separation.

Courtesy, Archives of the Daughters of Charity, Emmitsburg, MD

Mother Etienne (Mrs. Mary Catherine) **Hall** — b. 1806, d. 1872 — entered the Sisters of Charity in Emmitsburg in 1829; served in New York when the mission in Utica began, 1834; elected superior of the Sisters of Charity 20 July 1845 and was in office during the New York separation; served until 1850 when the Emmitsburg community became affiliated with the French motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity; was appointed first Visitatrix of the U.S. Province, 1850-1855.

In New York:

Sister Elizabeth Boyle — b. 1788, Baltimore; d. 1861 — a convert, she entered the Sisters of Charity in Emmitsburg in 1810 and was among the first group to make vows in 1813; served as Assistant under Mother Seton, September, 1814, novice mistress, 1815-1820, and Assistant under Mother Augustine Decount, 1828-1829; also Sister Servant of Saint Patrick's Asylum, New York, almost continuously from 1822-1846; she was elected first Mother of the New York community after the separation from Emmitsburg, 31 December 1846.

Bishop (later Archbishop) John Hughes — b. 1797, Ireland; d. 1863 — ordained 1826 and served in Philadelphia, where he gained fame as an articulate opponent of trusteeism; consecrated Bishop and named coadjutor to Bishop John Dubois of New York in 1838; succeeded as Ordinary of New York in 1842; ecclesiastical superior of the diocesan community, the Sisters of Charity of New York, formed in 1846.



Painting by the Italian artist Pietro Gagliardi (1809 - 1890), completed in 1873. The work was commissioned by the prominent New York politician John Kelly (1822 - 1886), who had attended St. Patrick's school, Mott Street, in the 1830s. The painting represents the duties of the New York Sisters of Charity: care of orphans, teaching, and caring for the sick. The Sisters are said to be returning to their home, having visited a sick woman and found her dead, with two newly orphaned children. The Sister seated at left may have been modeled after Mother Elizabeth Boyle. Currently the work resides in Le Gras Hall, Mount St. Vincent, N.Y. Our thanks to Sister Rita King, Archivist.

Courtesy Archives, Sisters of Charity of New York